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## **National Safety Month: Easing back on the highway**

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With COVID-19 restrictions lifting in states nationwide and on Army installations around the world, Soldiers and their families undoubtedly will be eager to hit the highways and catch up on long-delayed leisure travel.

There is risk in being too eager, however.

"We understand everyone is ready to get out of the house and, honestly, leaders feel the same way," said Command Sgt. Maj. William L. Gardner II, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center. "The danger will come from impatience during what is already the Army's deadliest time of year for off-duty vehicle mishaps."

The unprecedented measures leaders at all levels of government and the Army took to limit the spread of the potentially lethal coronavirus had an unintended side effect: Off-duty PMV-4 fatalities fell 25 percent during the second quarter of fiscal 2020, USACRC data show.

"COVID-19 travel and stay-at-home restrictions have played a significant role in reducing exposure levels and our overall mishap numbers to date," said Walt Beckman, loss prevention program manager at the USACRC. "But we can expect to see those numbers go up, perhaps at an alarming rate, as Soldiers try to make up lost time."

Compounding the risk is the traditional permanent change of station move cycle, which typically occurs in summer but has been on hold with the Department of Defense's stop-movement order. June through August also are historically the Army's peak months for PMV fatalities.

"Now is the time to start planning, counseling Soldiers, inspecting vehicles and reviewing leave and pass plans and policies," Beckman said. "These measures will better prepare our Soldiers and families for their trips once the pandemic threat is gone."

There are several key facts leaders should include in their counseling sessions and safety briefs. First are the top causal factors in PMV-4 mishaps: speeding, alcohol and non-use of seat belts, followed closely by fatigue.

"Those are the enduring challenges in off-duty vehicle mishaps," Beckman said, adding that improvements in reporting have revealed a visible increase in the number of distracted driving accidents during recent years.

Also of note is vehicle type — predominantly sedans — and Soldier demographics, with cadets through E-4 involved in 61 percent of PMV-4 mishaps during the past five years. This trend is in direct contrast to motorcycle mishaps, where leaders E-5 and above make up the largest share of reported mishaps.

“The disparity in rank between PMV-4 and motorcycle mishaps proves we must practice holistic risk management in everything we do,” Gardner said. “No one is immune to a mishap or the tragic effects of one.”

Lastly is when most off-duty vehicle mishaps occur: between 5 p.m. Friday and 5 a.m. Monday.

“The weekend period is when leaders have the least oversight of their Soldiers,” Beckman said. “That’s why it’s so important they continuously engage their formations on safe driving.

“It’s really not any different from risk management on duty. Make a plan, reassess as necessary and slow down.”

For more information on PMV safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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*Note: The USACRC will release one themed article and other media per week throughout the month of June in support of National Safety Month. Be sure to check the website regularly for updates.*